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BRITISH MUSIC THROUGH FRENCH EYES

By G. JEAN-AUBRY

THIS title in itself indicates clearly enough that one must not here expect to find a comprehensive account of the position of English music at the moment, but rather a French critic's opinions with regard to it, a critic who for some time past has made a careful study of this form of art in England and who here seeks to bring out some of its most salient features and to disengage what he considers its most important personalities and their works.

Doubtless I shall in many respects not be completely at one with a number of English critics, nor with the great majority of the British public. In my survey of English music of to-day I have naturally brought to bear many Continental ideas and sentiments. However, as I have had the privilege not only of taking my share in the French musical movement of the last twenty years, but also of being instrumental in the spreading of the work of the new Spanish and Italian schools in France, and as I am not ignorant either of Russian music, nor of the latest efforts of the young Hungarians, it is possible that I may introduce into my examination of English music other and wider points of view than such as could be reasonably expected from English critics or members of the musical public, who are perhaps less in a position to judge the art of their own country, on what one might call a European basis.

In a country where music of an original and personal order has for so long been strangled by foreign influences, as it has in England, the tendency has been to attach undue importance to works which made a sentimental or patriotic appeal rather than a purely æsthetic one.

I have for some considerable time been following the activities of young English musicians with a warm and living interest. It is my hope that this country may soon resume the magnificent place she formerly held in European music. No other country, I am convinced, has a greater future in store for her in this respect if she is willing to take the right path and rid herself of the asphyxiating influences which have suffocated her for so long a period.

About ten years ago when I first came to England I attempted to form an opinion of the musical resources of this country. I need hardly say that there is no possible comparison between what England was musically ten years ago and what she is to-day. There were some hesitating attempts at interesting work, but with few exceptions they lacked personality. Routine reigned supreme in all English institutions. In spite of the undoubted talent of certain individuals or rather because of it, musical England basked in an atmosphere of self-satisfaction and showed but a feeble interest for new forms of artistic expression.

The situation has improved considerably in ten years and still more since the war. But we must not attribute to the catastrophe of the war all the merit of the regeneration of English musical taste. Nothing would be more unjust. If the war has provided fresh opportunities, has dissipated a certain apathy, has admitted of the free development of several personalities, the reasons for the revival of music in England are to be sought in causes older, more complex and more profound. Beyond doubt the existence in England of music worthy of the name is one of those facts of which the entire continent of Europe had no suspicion. Up to quite recently, whenever I have asserted in France that there existed in England some musicians with a definite personality, I have met with almost universal incredulity. A similar incredulity is to be found, it must be admitted, even in England. How could it be otherwise? For more than a century and a half England has been devoid of genuinely national music. The slight interest shown in the riches of her old music, her remoteness from all that might seem to recall the days when life was a joy in itself, did not tend to convince other countries of its past existence.

Since the war all countries have been forced to reckon up as it were, all their resources, moral as well as intellectual and material. Patriotism in art has thus occasionally led to an intolerant and tiresome chauvinism which may, however, readily be pardoned if it proves to be the least aid towards valuable discoveries. The state of music in England has had the better chance of being revealed in the dazzling light of the war, in that it was the most simple, the most lamentably simple in any Western country. It is of no use to veil obvious situations with euphemism. Up to recently, and to a certain extent even to-day, it might be said without fear of exaggeration that England has been for at least a century and a half, as far as music is concerned, little else than a mere German colony.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that England since the middle of the eighteenth century has been without a genuine national music; the same thing happened to France. She, having enjoyed a great past in the days of Couperin and Rameau and even in those of the charming composers of "opéras comiques" from Dalayrac and Monsigny to Grétry and Boieldieu, saw all national characteristics disappear from her music under the repeated blows of Meyerbeer and Rossini, until the providential appearance of Berlioz, and of the movement better ordered and more easily accounted for, beginning with M. Saint-Saëns and M. Fauré and which is continued to-day with marvellous vitality.

In France, however, the German art of Meyerbeer was compelled to borrow much of the spirit of the French theatre—the innate taste for picturesque music of which Berlioz was to make such effective use, the successive and different influences of Chopin and Liszt, a critical sense which was on the alert, a fundamental love of contradiction, a burning desire to destroy "bastilles"—preserved under the surface, a spirit which re-awoke suddenly about the period of the war of 1870 and revived in France music which all too long had lain slumbering. In England it seems to me, this was not the case; the conquest was complete, absolute, the more so that it was based on political and moral grounds and that the advent of German influence in art coincided with that of the German influence in the conduct of affairs of the United Kingdom.

On examining from its earliest times, the history of English music, one cannot but consider the coming of Handel as one of the greatest calamities that have ever befallen the art of a country. However great the musical genius of the author of "The Messiah," and notwithstanding that his ashes were considered worthy of a resting-place in Westminster Abbey, it is beyond doubt that he was the first to pervert the true traditions of English music. There is a certain piquancy in noting at this moment an opinion dating from 1733 in the writing of the author of "Manon Lescaut," Abbé Prévost:

Mr. Handel has lately introduced into London a new kind of composition which is performed under the name of oratorio. Though the subject is religious, it forms as great an attraction as the opera. He combines all the styles, the heroic, the tender, the vivacious, the graceful. Some critics accuse him of having merely borrowed as a foundation a number of beautiful things from Lully and especially from some French cantatas which, they say, he has skilfully disguised in the Italian manner.

In truth, Handel, though he came to London as the leader of an Italian opera company, implanted there a conception of music essentially German. I agree that the German music of this period was infinitely superior to any that was to be found in England, then at the close of the movement which from Byrd, Gibbons and Purcell, down to Eccles, Richard Jones and Babell had endowed her with a chamber music, emotional and delightful, at times even great, and usually profoundly national.

It is well known how dexterously Handel accommodated himself to the taste which then ruled and which the succession to the throne of England, first of the House of Orange, and then of the House of Hanover was destined to establish more and more firmly in the country. All the freedom, the charm, the joy of life, alternately rugged and dainty, vigorous and subtle, which had marked English art in the great period, vanished under the rod of German puritanism. In vain the Italianism of Clementi and the Irish reveries of Field attempted to shake off this tyranny. English sovereigns continued to look towards Germany whence they came. Just as English religious feeling was distorted *ad libitum* under the strong hand of Handel, so English sentimentality grew apace under the influence of Mendelssohn; then came the rule of Brahms, the worst of all.

It is startling to observe to how great an extent Handel, Mendelssohn and Brahms have become the household gods of English music during the course of the nineteenth century. It is not my purpose to dispute the undoubted genius of these three composers, but to lament the slavery to which England has been subjected by them and from which she is by no means completely set free. To suppose that this triple influence is at an end and that the war has thrown down the idols in the dust, would be a mistake. Particularly as regards Brahms, it would be well for England to commit a wilful injustice, and that public opinion should lay on one side for a considerable time, a composer whose influence appears pernicious to a degree to the free development of English music.

We have seen in France during the past fifteen years, composers and critics, including M. Claude Debussy, to mention only the one most deservedly famous, waging war against Richard Wagner, though well aware of his genius and the fertility of his imagination, simply because they saw that Wagner's influence threatened to be fatal to the rising musical generation. Even those who had learnt much from the teaching of Wagner were the first to advise turning away from him. The advice was good.

Because he was not sensible of the necessity of this course, Chabrier followed too closely in the footsteps of Wagner and failed to reveal the force of his personality in many a passage of "Gwendoline" and it is the same with Ernest Chausson in "Le Roi Arthus"; but for this anti-Wagnerism in a man who had studied deeply the work of Wagner, we should perhaps not have had "Pelléas et Mélisande."

When shall we see a campaign opened in England against Brahms? In art it is sometimes necessary to be ungrateful for the sake of one's own salvation. If Brahms were laid aside for a dozen years he would be none the worse and England would be the better. It would then be possible to re-approach Brahms in an independent spirit, and no longer as now, in an atmosphere of fetish-worship which welcomes alike the good and the bad in this composer and keeps music teachers under the influence of ideas more and more "fossilized." To recopy to satiety the German classics and above all, Brahms, to initiate incessantly their thematic combinations, their structure, their spirit, their form, it is to this, in truth, that England's musical activity has for years, until quite recently, been almost entirely confined. With this, most of the academies and colleges where music is taught, are content.

During this period, a feverish musical activity prevailed in the four corners of Europe. Under the influence, conscious or unconscious, of Liszt, a movement towards the nationalization of music was on foot, which little by little robbed Germany of her artistic hegemony at the very moment when the genius of Wagner seemed likely to establish it for a long time. In turn, the Russians, the Scandinavians, the French, the Spaniards, the Italians rivalled one another in following this path; the musical characteristics of each race of each people showed themselves to the full with a variety, a richness, a subtlety more striking and more conspicuous than at any other time for several centuries. These different nations borrowed from one another means of expression which they assimilated, combined or distorted to suit their particular needs. Out of these interchanges and these divergencies were born works, picturesque or moving, full of colour or delicate in their beauty, which enriched the world of music with splendours unthought of and unnumbered.

Meanwhile England, sunk in her imitation of Germany, continued conscientiously to manufacture symphonies, quartets, trios in a mould hopelessly classical, without fresh interest or study, without concerning herself with what was happening outside

of Munich, Leipzig or Berlin. By following this course English musicians learnt music, but as a trade only, a decaying trade, comprised in superannuated formulas: as though you could learn the art of writing by copying perpetually the great classical tragedies.

Schools and students of music, musical diplomas, musical scholarships, musical works were multiplied with no great profit to English music. With the exception of Sir Edward Elgar no composer appeared whose work would stand exporting to the Continent with any chance—I do not say of success—but of arousing the interest of the musical public. Some attempts to acclimatize in France English symphonic music left only a memory of boredom, a memory which renders difficult even to-day the task of those who seek to make the latest English music known there.

Some people have gone so far as to assert that if the French public and the critics have shown a lack of enthusiasm for English works of this kind, the reason is that they are completely English and thus incomprehensible to us. The argument is weak in view of the manner in which for twenty years now the Russians, from Borodine to Strawinsky, the Germans, from Wagner to Richard Strauss, the Spaniards, from Pedrell to Albeniz, have been received in France. If English works of this period left nothing behind but a sense of ennui, they probably, with few exceptions, contained neither definite characteristics nor any marked individuality.

I have had opportunities of hearing several of them again during my recent visits to England, in English surroundings, and I must admit that the French public was not far wrong. I need mention no names. If English music of the Victorian era merits our respect, it is not calculated, in my opinion, to arouse enthusiasm. We must make up our minds on the point; we have done so in France: Benjamin Godard and Théodore Dubois no longer have many admirers.

In the whole Victorian era, the name and work of Edward Elgar alone survives. Here we have to do with a real musician, a composer thoroughly versed in the technique of his art. Several of his works are conceived on a grand scale and in spite of this are not superficial. But here again I regret to be unable to agree with my English colleagues. I fear that the case of Sir Edward Elgar in England is similar to that of M. Camille Saint-Saëns in France; there seems to me to be a great resemblance both from the historical and intellectual point of view, allowing for the

divergencies of their characters, and the different surroundings in which they worked. Just as there is a certain melodic line, certain recurring processes, typical of M. Saint-Saëns—I recently heard a young composer, one of the foremost, play something “in the manner of Saint-Saëns”—so there is assuredly in Sir Edward Elgar a special trait which makes it easy after a short time to recognise a page of his work. Nevertheless, I do not consider that in true originality Sir Edward Elgar surpasses M. Camille Saint-Saëns; in neither case, do I think that their work is destined to win a greater place than it has already achieved.

Certainly Sir Edward Elgar enjoys in England a reputation the more unassailable in that he had, it is said, to wait a long time for it. In the same manner, M. Camille Saint-Saëns is furnished with all the titles to which a composer can aspire. There is, let us add, no resemblance between the characters of these two composers, the one is as English as the other is French; but the part they have played has been in a measure the same.

Whatever may be the fate, in the future, of their works, it will be impossible to write the history of the music of either country without finding a place for them. As with M. Saint-Saëns in France, Sir Edward Elgar's greatest merit consisted in adapting German classical forms to the English cast of mind and modifying classical precepts to suit truly national requirements. In this light, the two *Symphonies*, the *Dream of Gerontius*, the *Violin Concerto*, are works which deserve a place equivalent to that held by M. Camille Saint-Saëns' *Symphony in C*. In both cases we are under the impression that these works were too readily hailed as masterpieces.

The residuum of real originality in these two composers is found in process of time and on further analysis, to be less than is often thought. It is not enough to have a vast knowledge and to manifest a supreme dexterity in your profession; it is also essential if not to express new thoughts, at any rate to show a certain freshness of attitude in regard to feelings and things, and that, I think, is as much lacking in Sir Edward Elgar, as in M. Camille Saint-Saëns. English music of the Victorian epoch has had neither its César Franck nor its Gabriel Fauré.

However, we must in justice to Sir Edward Elgar acknowledge his services in pointing out the path to young English composers just as M. Camille Saint-Saëns did for the generation which succeeded him. Not that either the one or the other were much concerned with what the generation which followed did or thought. The sight of Sir Edward Elgar ostentatiously holding

aloof from the movement which has been going on for several years in English musical life, would be surprising, did we not find in France M. Camille Saint-Saëns showing no interest in the younger French composers except to cry them down or attempt to discourage them. On the whole, the attitude of Sir Edward Elgar is preferable, but we must always regret that men holding their high position should not have thought it their duty to use it for the purpose of gathering round them the younger forces which are feeling their way, as César Franck did and as Gabriel Fauré is still doing.

One need only talk with some of the more venturesome amongst the younger English musicians to realize exactly the place that the composer of the *Dream of Gerontius* holds. No one denies his talent; the younger generation has a profound respect for him, but at the same time it is fully aware that henceforward no help or guidance is to be sought in his compositions.

Whilst Victorian composers pursued their work, completely under the spell of German influence, fresh currents were slowly but surely making their way. The policy of "splendid isolation" was at an end.

Meanwhile a king had ascended the throne who notwithstanding that his tastes were profoundly and essentially English, could at the same time when he chose, be continental, and who followed Stuart traditions more closely than those of the House of Hanover.

As France in 1715, after the death of Louis XIVth, felt the need of shaking off the tyranny of the rigorous "pietism" imposed by Madame de Maintenon, the weight of the "respectability," the strictness, and not to mince matters, the boredom of the Victorian era, began to seem intolerable even to the best drilled natures, when Edward VIIth ascended the throne. The need was felt of relaxing, of recovering a somewhat freer life. Literature was the first to exhibit these tendencies under the influence of fresh political currents.

In the world of music the matter was not so easy; each college and each academy was a strong fortress not easily to be reduced, under the direction of a staff belonging to a generation which was not only tenacious of its ideas and its privileges, but was obviously beginning to feel its position menaced. Thanks to the Entente Cordiale and an admiration for France, always dormant in spite of the wars between the two countries, and shown in the relations between the freer spirits in both countries, an interest in French music began to spread with some rapidity. The personality of

M. Claude Debussy exercised over Great Britain an instant and deep fascination bringing in its train a marked taste for the works of M. Maurice Ravel and the French modern school in general. This was sufficient to make the defenders of the old tradition (it is by this name we usually call people who merely defend the ideas of their youth) begin to rise up and declare that all the young English composers who had any originality, or aimed at originality, were doing nothing but imitate Debussy and that English music was in danger. It soon became apparent that the misfortune, if you are to call it so, was even greater and that it was not only the music of France but of the whole continent which was beginning to invade England, I hasten to add, to her great advantage.

As chance willed, there appeared at this moment a man of great enterprise whose endeavours, a little unsystematic at first, took shape little by little, and who thanks to his means, to his definite personality and his remarkable gifts as a conductor, soon played a part specially favourable to the development of English music, I refer to Sir Thomas Beecham.

Here we find a man who not only had borrowed practically nothing from German art, but was indebted to nature for the greater part of his taste and his talent. And his nature strongly disposed him towards the newest and subtlest forms of modern music wherever they were to be found in France, in Russia, in Italy. The manner in which Sir Thomas Beecham has staged certain works is open to discussion; some of his interpretations may be liable to criticism, but it is beyond doubt that the advent of this man in English musical life has largely contributed to its rehabilitation and that in the direction where improvement was most necessary.

It was high time for England to conceive a taste for works less heavy and of smaller dimensions. For the principle of quantity, imported direct from Germany, should rather be substituted that of quality; that the fascination of finesse, of irony of humour, which are at least as characteristic of the English nature as religious spirit and sentimentality, should be more clearly manifested in her music.

Sir Thomas Beecham combined a decided taste for the eighteenth century with a strong appreciation of the newest developments in French and Russian music; at the same time, he showed a desire to encourage fresh tendencies in English music. He has been a wonderful instrument and no more salutary influence could be desired by all those who regretted to see English music falling asleep under a routine which became more and more

depressing. Thanks to Sir Thomas Beecham concerts became more frequent where other things besides Tchaikowsky's "1812" were given, and opera seasons where it was possible to listen to something else than Wagner or Gounod. In less than ten years the English public was suddenly brought face to face with the whole of the European musical movement, a movement which had been going on for nearly half a century.

It is not therefore surprising that neither English composers nor the public are as yet very certain of their aims. Towards all these referred novelties the English public, as usual, assumed a polite and attentive attitude, waiting for the critics to furnish strong arguments and to lay down the law in a peremptory manner. Among English critics there were a few spirits at this moment who were not only studious but venturesome and gifted with great breadth of vision and intellectual avidity, such as Mr. Ernest Newman and Mr. Edwin Evans, whose opinions have in an advantageous manner seconded Sir Thomas Beecham's efforts.

In the generation which followed Sir Edward Elgar, there were without doubt certain individuals wider in their sympathies. I refer particularly to Mr. Granville Bantock, Mr. Joseph Holbrooke and Mr. Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Mr. Granville Bantock is in some measure the connecting link between the Victorian period and the present time. He has a taste for works of large dimensions, complicated structure, massed effects, all characteristics of the former period, and in his use of exotic colour, he has anticipated the latter. It happened that during his early years he led a roving life and came early into contact with other musical conceptions than those of England and Germany; an innate taste, as it seems, for Orientalism, from Persian to Chinese, has given him perhaps hardly the intuition of a Balakirew or a Debussy in the use of Asiatic atmosphere, but it has at least had the effect of heightening the tones of a palette which tended to become heavy. His important work "Omar Khayyam," symphony, oratorio and opera all in one, reveals these two opposing tendencies. We are bound to admire in Mr. Granville Bantock his constant effort to rid himself of his early teaching and his persistent search for new forms of expression. If he is not always successful, the fault lies with the narrow instruction of his youthful days, so general in England, but he is at least ceaselessly striving towards this aim, and when we measure his ideas by the standard of those which prevailed at the time when he was making his first essay at composition, it is impossible not to recognize how meritorious were his attempts.

As regards Mr. Joseph Holbrooke, what he lacks is simply concentration. For us who are accustomed in our composers to a very limited number of works, refined to an extreme point, Mr. Holbrooke's work often seems like those English novels from which a third could be cut out with profit. No one could be more gifted than Mr. Holbrooke, but in his exuberance he often drowns the deeper qualities of his nature. There is, perhaps, at this moment (with the exception of M. Conrado del Campo in Spain) no young composer more prolific and more unequal. Possibly the fact of his having been at the outset of his career a conductor in small theatres and also the possession of a great desire for originality, have saved Mr. Holbrooke from falling into academic routine but have not protected him from all the dangers that beset those who thirst for innovations. It is still very difficult to make a choice amongst all Mr. Holbrooke's works; certain of his compositions such as the songs to Edgar Poe's words, his *Second Quartet*, "*Impressions*," the *Clarinet Quintet No. 1 in D minor*, his symphonic suite "*Queen Mab*" are well worthy of notice.

However, it is perhaps legitimate to consider with still more attention the work and the personality of Mr. Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Mr. Vaughan Williams and Mr. Cyril Scott are certainly to-day amongst those rare composers whose names, if not their works, are known in France. The chief reason for this is that Mr. Vaughan Williams came to France to study with M. Maurice Ravel for a time. This fact in itself proved this young composer's point of view, for though it was usual to find numbers of Spanish, Italian and even Russian composers seeking help and instruction in the French musical "milieu," the example of Mr. Vaughan Williams is unique of its kind.

Mr. Vaughan Williams came to study with M. Maurice Ravel in Paris after having been a pupil of Sir Hubert Parry and Sir Charles Stanford in London and of Max Bruch in Berlin. This attraction towards many and often very contradictory influences is in itself a strong proof of the mental conflicts of the young English musicians scarcely ten years ago. Mr. Vaughan Williams still bears the impress of these different influences. It is difficult to form a final judgment of this composer, not only because he is still young and because his true personality is not fully developed, but because four years ago he voluntarily gave up composition for military service. However, taking into account only his older works, that is, those dating from 1902 to 1913, it is possible if not to form a complete estimate of the personality

of Mr. Vaughan Williams, at any rate definitely to recognize its existence and to regard him as one of the first musicians of a genuinely English type in the art of to-day.

Mr. Vaughan Williams was one of the first Englishmen to understand the real value of folk-song and the use to which it could be put. He was not, like others, satisfied with taking a folk-song theme, introducing it into a symphony and presenting it to the public arranged according to the recipes laid down in the manuals, which always impart to the folk-song theme the awkward and uncouth carriage of a peasant in a drawing-room. Mr. Vaughan Williams has made a zealous study of English folk-songs, but he has done more; he has so far entered into the spirit as to do for English folk-song what masters like Chopin and Albeniz did for Poland and Spain, that is to say, to invent themes with the character and colour of folk-song. He has perhaps been more successful in his attempts in this direction than in any other, so far; songs like the remarkable suite "*On Wenlock Edge*" for voice, piano and string quartet, which is in a fair way to become a classic in the best English musical circles, in "*The Roadside Fire*," in the charming "*Bright is the Ring of Words*";—it is in these songs and in the *Phantasy Quintet* that in our view we find Mr. Vaughan Williams best work and not in compositions like the *Sea Symphony* or the *London Symphony*.

In these symphonic works of large dimensions we certainly find a great knowledge of technique, co-ordination of the individual parts, an interest in new combinations of tone colour, but their length exceeds our French power of endurance. I have quite recently had an opportunity of hearing the *London Symphony* and to study its structure. The first movement seems to me, in regard to colour, balance, sureness of orchestration, originality of timbres, in the mingling of the picturesque and the emotional, one of the greatest successes in all contemporary English music, but the lengthy monotony of the three following movements drowns many a pleasing detail which merits a better fate. I think that if Mr. Vaughan Williams consented to remould this work, to condense its component parts, to concentrate the emotion, no one would be the loser and we also hope that he will give us still better work when peace comes once more. I place Mr. Vaughan Williams not only in the front rank of English composers of to-day, but on a line with those from whom we have a right to expect much.

In this respect it appears to me that he is far ahead of Mr. Cyril Scott in whom much hope was placed a little prematurely,

perhaps, a few years ago, because his works contained a certain number of new processes, invented by French composers, and with which the public in France felt quite at home, just as with an Englishman who speaks rather good French. I do not for my part see the good of young English composers going on copying slavishly Debussy's or Ravel's methods; very little would be gained if the yoke of Brahms were shaken off only to exchange it for that of another.

It is of course, impossible for a composer of to-day to write as if Claude Debussy had never existed; but there is assuredly a certain difference between this and following him too closely; what interests us is to discover in England works definitely English in character, reflections of some of the virtues or even defects inherent in the race or races which are mingled there, and not works too directly inspired by foreign influences. Without doubt Mr. Cyril Scott has been the means of introducing into England modern French compositions, particularly those for the piano, but also that his extraordinarily rapid power of assimilation, perhaps also a similarity of outlook, made him adopt sooner than any other in his country the new forms of expression first used by the French school. It seems as if Mr. Scott's individuality did not disengage itself sufficiently; as if, on the whole, his power of assimilation had been more a hindrance than a help. What drew us to him ten years ago already appears a little old-fashioned. One cannot help feeling that in Mr. Scott's work intellect and will play a more prominent part than the emotions and though it is true in art that emotion without craftsmanship soon becomes faded, craftsmanship without emotion is not slow in losing the freshness of its coloring. One can be certain of nothing in a nature as supple and singular as Mr. Scott's, but I do not see that he has enriched English music with any very personal elements, although he has facilitated its liberation, by the introduction of fresh documents borrowed from the music of other countries.

English music of to-day numbers, in my opinion, six talented composers whose arbitrary union forms what one might call the Modern English School; there are hardly any bonds between these composers. I am not even sure that they know one another, but they all possess besides their individual characteristics, common tendencies in their manner of thinking and in the aims they set up for themselves. They are Mr. Arnold Bax, Mr. Gustav von Holst, Mr. Frank Bridge, Mr. Roger Quilter, Mr. John Ireland and Mr. Eugene Goossens. Amongst these young men, Mr. John Ireland seems to me the strongest personality, one of whom much

may be expected and who before long may become a composer interesting not only to England, but to the world.

It is certainly ten years since I first heard of John Ireland, who is not a very young man as he is nearing the forties. On a first acquaintance with his work, I took him to be a receptive student, not a man of particular originality. Mr. Ireland's individuality was slow in developing, but this seems only to have made it all the more distinct. For my part, I think lightly of his first published *Sonata for Piano and Violin* and of his *Phantasy Trio* in A minor, and also of two of the *Songs of a Wayfarer*, all works written between 1908 and 1911; but since that time, Mr. Ireland has published a series of works which all merit attention and which are beginning to make him an important personality in England.

Mr. John Ireland is endowed with a sort of sceptical modesty and a philosophic irony which would put him on his guard against his admirers themselves. The rapid and well-deserved success of his last compositions will not have the disastrous effect that it might have had on another nature.

With the exception of *The Forgotten Rite*, an orchestral prelude of mystical character, all Mr. John Ireland's work consists of chamber-music. Of his work up to the present the most interesting and the most individual is without comparison the *Sonata in A minor*, which was almost at once warmly received. Well constructed as it was, the first *Sonata in D minor*, written in 1909, gave no idea of the personality which reveals itself in the Second dating from 1917.

For clever construction, solidity of thematic material, interesting sound combinations, and in a general way, the singularly English atmosphere which pervades it, from one end to the other, more especially in the Finale, the *Sonata in A minor* is one of the most characteristic works of the young English school. We find here a composer who is no longer content only with following scholastic precepts, of applying them dexterously, but the voice of a sensitive personality, a temperament, who without regard to schools, theories or dogmas, gives itself free play or restrains itself according to circumstances.

Mr. John Ireland's nature is made up of highly contradictory elements welded into a very distinct personality. There is in him an emotional side, not outward and romantic, not insipid and overflowing, as is too often the case with English musical emotion when under the dominion of the disastrous "ballad" tradition, but in his work he endeavours to express his feelings with great restraint and to balance a latent romanticism with a vein of irony.

Personally, I am thankful to Mr. John Ireland for not falling into the snare of following too closely in the footsteps of French music. He is as far removed from this as from the spirit of Victorian music; he has a well-developed sense of contrasts; he can in turn be ardent and serious as in his *Trio in One Movement* and amusing and ironical as in his *London Pieces* for the piano.

With the exception of Mr. Vaughan Williams, perhaps even more than this composer in the realm of chamber-music, Mr. John Ireland appears to me the most profoundly English of the rising generation; the one whose works are best fitted to give an idea outside of England of what English music can be. He produces this effect not only in the *Sonata in A minor*, but also in the *Rhapsody* for the piano, in several of his songs, such as *Sea Fever* and *Marigold* and in his recent works for the piano, *Preludes* and *London Pieces*.

Sea Fever to the poem by John Masefield is certainly in its expressiveness one of the most beautiful songs that have been written in England for a long time; one of those in which we find again that traditional love of the composer for his literary text as well as in regard to prosody, as atmosphere and psychological penetration.

It is impossible to deny that with but few exceptions English composers have for years not given much thought to the choice of words for their songs and they set to work writing music to any kind of nonsense. One has no idea of the wretched texts used by even the most serious composers of the previous generation. It is almost inconceivable, bearing in mind that England is probably the richest country in the world in lyric poetry, what poems or so-called poems composers have chosen. Happily, a tendency towards an in all respects healthy reaction has for some time now begun to make itself felt. People are no longer content with the eternal nightingale and the traditional garden. This new effort gives cause for rejoicing.

One must rejoice especially over the greater concern that composers are showing in regard to prosody. It would not be fair to throw the blame on them for the laziness of a certain number of executants who articulate badly; everyone knows that it is generally impossible even for natives to understand the words of an English song when it is sung. It is to be hoped that the reign of the ballad which has let loose such an immense amount of bad taste in England is ended and that it is banished with the old French "Romance," in its way not much better, to the darkest corner of musical history, where some crank could fish them out, if he is so minded.

Whether he chooses poems by Rossetti, by Ernest Dowson, by Masfield or Rupert Brooke, Mr. John Ireland uses his texts with a rare insight, for which he deserves unqualified praise. The attention and the careful precision with which he sets his poems to music is just the reason which makes their translation into another language difficult, but perhaps some day composers will appear, capable of giving the entire musical world the conviction that English is quite as singable with good music as any other occidental language.

The two *London Pieces* ("Chelsea Reach" and "Ragamuffin") for the piano, show that Mr. John Ireland has a sense of humor which up to this time has been rather wanting and of which, in my opinion, we can expect much. In themselves these two pieces are delightful, the one full of pleasant satire on English sentimentality, the other of the ease and carelessness of the London urchin; and I see in them signs of something still more important.

These same signs I find also in Mr. Eugène Goossens recent pieces for the piano. There is appearing in English music a truly youthful spirit and, moreover, a spirit truly national; these young composers, very skilled in their craft, educated in colleges whose dogmas they have happily rejected are beginning to banish entirely the fetish of the grand style and the religion of the serious at all price. They have no fear of being playful, satirical and humourous. They do not throw themselves into great works as if in duty bound; their compositions begin to breath the joy of living and thinking.

Perhaps I may be wrong, but I feel certain that in the line of musical humour, in true musical comedy, England is perhaps destined to go further than any other country from the day on which she is delivered from all the depressing influences which still weigh on her and when composers recognize that more genius and real greatness are required to write *Le Nozze di Figaro* than this or that monstrous symphony.

There is, in my view, in England a great element of "joie de vivre," a fantastic side, ranging from Falstaff to Ariel, which is only beginning to be applied to English music. In the music of the people there are endless riches in rythm and colour which could be used in an original manner. It would become a young composer to penetrate to the depths of this aspect of the English nature, or to partake of it himself and give it a natural expression; he will thus discover this mingling of imagination, sadness, comedy and a deep-seated irony from which springs the clown, an important personage, a type which could easily be ennobled. For

my part, I am expecting to see one of the young English composers attempting to write a comic opera rather than transposing the mechanism of the Tetralogy into Wales or Scotland. If humor in music has a future, and of this I am entirely convinced (have we not seen it in France in certain pages of Chabrier's work and in that little masterpiece, Maurice Ravel's *Heure Espagnole*) I think that it is in England we are to seek it.

Happily, as I have said, the fetish of great, dull works no longer haunts the composers of the new generation; neither Mr. Roger Quilter nor the Benjamin of English music, Mr. Eugène Goossens, (who is barely twenty-five) fall into this snare.

Mr. Roger Quilter, after having at the outset of his career inclined towards a somewhat facile and weak emotion, at times a little too seductive, has gradually come to expressing himself with greater depth, without losing any of his charm. His three last songs to William Blake's poems, give the full measure of his subtle and refined art, by turns melancholy and full of youthful freshness, attracted as he is in his art towards the simplest means, towards works of small proportions, towards the spirit of fairy-tales, of imaginings, supple and delicate.

With Mr. John Ireland, but endowed with a very different nature, Mr. Eugène Goossens has made his appearance in the firmament of English music, since the war. Prodigiously gifted, pianist, violinist, composer, and in spite of his tender age, one of England's best conductors, with a knowledge of almost the whole of music, conducting Russian operas quite as well as French symphonic poems, ignorant of nothing as regards his profession which he learnt certainly more by natural genius than by diligent study, Mr. Eugène Goossens who, by his Belgian antecedence is partly continental, is at a stage in his career when one could hardly expect him to give the full measure of his personality, stripped of all that draws him in various directions. He has assimilated the orchestral influence of Strauss as well as of Debussy; he has been ravished by Maurice Ravel's ingenious writing; he is not unacquainted with Scriabine's laboured refinement any more than with Stravinski's suggestive work; and, however, if his work bears traces of influence, one begins to discover these reflections of a personality destined certainly, to manifest itself vividly in future works.

He has already written several chamber-music works and several orchestral ones, which he looks upon as juvenilia, and a few songs. Of all his works, in my opinion, a place must be set apart for his *Quartet*, his *Trio* for flute, violoncello and piano, his

Rhapsody for violoncello, his last songs, two books of pieces for the piano, *Kaleidoscope*, a collection of twelve little pieces and an album *Four Conceits*.

The art of Mr. Goossens is naturally complex. I say naturally, not only because this is bound to be the case coming as it does from a youthful intellect open to all fresh impressions, but again naturally because Mr. Goossens' nature is composed of extremely subtle elements, of pointed irony, of smiling insight, and all this bathed in a veritable atmosphere of youth, not a youth that chatters at random but one that does not consider it necessary to take up a bored attitude, just because it already knows a great deal.

I ought probably to have spoken first of Mr. Frank Bridge and of Mr. Arnold Bax who for some time have been well-known in English musical circles, though they are both what is generally called young composers. Mr. Frank Bridge mingles very felicitously Victorian or classical traditions with modernism; his work is unequal but always carefully written. He has a special gift for chamber-music, though his work *Isabella* is one of the most characteristic works in the English music of his generation; but it is particularly his *Trios*, his *Sonata* for piano and violoncello, and his *Quintet* that deserve attention.

Mr. Arnold Bax possesses without doubt a sensitive and interesting individuality of which it seems to me he has hitherto hardly succeeded in conveying a complete impression. Perhaps Mr. Bax failed sufficiently to co-ordinate his indubitable gifts and to restrain his emotions which go out not in the direction of a scholastic development, but are carried away in a rapture that lacks moderation and would benefit by being more concentrated. His recent *Quintet*, not yet published, reveals a spirit full of ideas, bent on delighting us, and knowing how to express itself without being commonplace. Mr. Arnold Bax is certainly one of the most engaging of the composers of the new English school; but it is a pity that he is not sometimes more on his guard against being carried away by his talent.

Mr. Gustav von Holst, in spite of his Dutch name, must be counted amongst the most interesting composers of the younger generation of Englishmen. It is not, to tell the truth, because Mr. von Holst, like Mr. Vaughan Williams, Mr. Roger Quilter or even Mr. John Ireland, seeks his musical inspiration from the well-springs of English tradition; the greater part of Mr. von Holst's work is devoted to oriental subjects, Hindu mostly, but one must not expect to find there the oriental colouring which so fascinated

French and Russian composers; what Mr. von Holst attempts to convey is not the colouring of India so much as the essence of Hindu philosophy. Except in his orchestral suite "*Beni Mora*," where he gives a picture of the external characteristics of Algeria, all the merit of Mr. von Holst's work lies in the depth and the skilful arrangement of their symphonic and vocal parts.

Mr. von Holst is one of the young composers with the greatest knowledge and understanding of English musicians of bygone days. With regard to Purcell amongst others, he has shown intelligence as an interpreter and has arranged performances of several of his works; through his intimate knowledge of old works he has acquired a true sense of English prosody, so often disregarded by English song writers in modern times. Besides the *Cloud Messenger* which already shows originality, Mr. von Holst's most successful productions hitherto are the *Choral Hymns* from the *Rig Veda*, particularly *Hymn to the Unknown God* of the first group, *To Varuna* and *Funeral Chant* of the second group.

Other composers ought to be mentioned, for in the rising musical generation in England there are rich and varied personalities: I wish particularly to draw attention to Mr. Balfour Gardiner, whose *Shepherd Fennel's Dance* has met with a well-merited success and become almost a classic. It shares the enviable fate of Mr. Paul Dukas' *Apprenti Sorcier* in France.

I would also speak of Mr. Percy Grainger, had not his frequent visits to the United States made him so well-known there that it is unnecessary for a voice from Europe to add any comment. He must, however, be counted amongst those who have done most for the rejuvenating of modern English music; he has particularly made very apt use of themes taken from folk-music and of tunes several hundred years old, but in which it must be admitted, there is more freshness and vigour than in many a recent work. To tell the truth, Mr. Percy Grainger uses this material in a very personal manner. Whether it be in his *Mock Morris Dance* or in his quartets like *Molly on the Shore* or in the admirable *Sea Chanty* he always shows himself a clever and intelligent adapter, possessing a youthfulness particularly attractive and fascinating. Mr. Percy Grainger's works always have the air of being written for the joy of the thing and radiate the pleasure of living. These are impressions not so often conveyed by English works and are therefore particularly acceptable.

I wish to name also a new composer who has hitherto published only a single work, but who in my view reveals certain qualities from which a good deal can be expected; I mean Mr. Gerald

Tyrwhitt. He has produced thus far nothing but the *Three Little Funeral Marches* for the piano, little amusing and ironical pieces which contain, all the same, truly musicianly properties. Though Mr. Tyrwhitt is what is commonly called an amateur,—he is in the diplomatic service—I do not see why I should not include him amongst composers, without regard to social categories set up by critics, thus following the example of Stravinski and Alfred Casella, who have encouraged the first attempts of this young Englishman. We are of course dealing here with a tentative work of small proportions, for this is what he has given us in the *Three Funeral Marches*, but there is originality in the writing, a true sense of irony in the music itself, not only in the humorous titles and amusing commentaries that augurs well for Mr. Tyrwhitt's future. I must record that these little pieces met with a favourable reception in Italy, in Spain and in France even before anyone attempted to play them in England, and that recently a pianist did not consider them sufficiently serious to be included in a programme.

The fact is that, alas, the last exhalations from what we Frenchmen cannot help calling "Victorian ennui" have not yet been entirely dispelled. Everyone agrees that we are a frivolous people and lack a sense of the serious;—at least, this is how our enemies are pleased to represent us, because we have little patience with those who bore us, but we have in our own patrimony sufficiently great works to be able to form a judgment of what is really great. I think that a nation which has given birth to the tragedies of Racine and Corneille, the operas of Rameau, the novels of Balzac and those of Flaubert and the paintings of Delacroix can claim not to be confined in its appreciation to works pretty and small; but we are not of those who are taken in by a false appearance of greatness and who are easily led to believe that all that is enormous is beautiful.

It is naturally from a French standpoint that we view the English musical situation, but also in regard to what may be profitable for England. There is certainly in England a taste for things rather solid, a substratum of violence, of healthy joy which are far removed from the French character, but there is also a sense of irony and humour, a richness of rhythm which, though very different from our own, are easy for us to understand. No one could be more convinced than I am, of the possibility of a great musical future for England, nor more certain of the excellence of the road along which she is at present moving. It is by getting rid of that exaggerated German influence in music that England

will find again a sense, strong, beautiful and durable, of her veritable musical inheritance.

A people fighting for liberty is an absorbing spectacle, but it is no less absorbing to see an art liberating itself and discovering anew her genuine traditions. If one lacked prudence and a sense of the swiftness of modern life one might attempt to give dogmatic and precise opinions concerning a movement as indefinite as the one which has been going on for ten years and which from day to day manifests itself in a more marked manner in English music; but no other country with the exception of modern Italy perhaps, presents as fascinating a spectacle in regard to all the problems waiting for new solutions, the new hope to which it gives birth and the fresh energies which it calls to life.

How far will this new development go? It is impossible to foresee as yet, but already to-day England can boast of several composers who, particularly in the domain of chamber-music, can bear the test of being placed before a foreign public and command attention not only because of the works in themselves, but for the national characteristics which they contain.

It is high time for us to realize that English music has come into new powers and that a brilliant future may be in store for it.